

131hh- Even Being A Layman Does Not Justify Your Sensuality

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(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

The important thing for a person who is interested in following the Buddha's instruction, is for them to start reading the discourses that contain the Buddha's instructions, and continue reading them because there are many different layers of understanding, i.e. the first time you read them, you're inspired and it makes some sense but if you keep that practice going then when you get back to that discourse at some later stage, you get more out of it, you can realize that your previous understanding might be correct but now you just went a step further, so within your original understanding you now understood more, and that will then make you think that there might be even more to understand even within a discourse that you think you have fully understood.

It's important to recognize that you can never know too much in terms of the Buddha's instruction, the more you know the greater likelihood you will be applying yourself to the practice correctly, which means that there is a greater likelihood that you will get to discern those things within your experience.

It's important to practice learning, but for those things to apply, virtue and sense restraint need to be fully established, and that's the main point. Often people differentiate between a layperson and a monk, and yes there is a difference in terms of the external statement and particular lifestyle, but the important difference is whether a person lives with sensuality or without it.

Most commonly, a layperson is a person who lives with sensuality, and usually, the monks are the ones practicing restraint. It's important to differentiate this because if someone, who is interested in practicing Buddhism, chooses to live as a layperson for whatever reason, that doesn't mean that they must automatically not practice sense restraint. Quite often I would hear people say something like, "Oh I cannot be a monk because I have to look after my mother, and therefore by default I can also engage in sensuality because I have a good reason to not be a monk." Well, that's completely wrong thinking, and its two separate things, whether you want to pursue the lifestyle of a monk or the lifestyle of a layperson that's one decision, now you make another decision on top of that to not practice sense restraint or to practice it only partially, which has nothing to do with your choice of being a layman. You are responsible for confusing these things and then acting out of sensuality, which is the same when somebody becomes a monk and expects the circumstances and environment to do the sense restraint for him and makes no effort internally to uproot sensuality on the level of the mind. So although they are not engaging in sensual activity with their body they are still very much within the domain of sensuality.

There are discourses where laypeople understood the Dhamma but they did not understand the Dhamma on account of a sensual life. Whenever someone stays a layperson after understanding the Dhamma and not going forth on account of their confidence in the Buddha's instruction, it was always rooted in some necessity, like having to look after their children or dependents that would die if they leave. So it wasn't just that others would be upset with them. No, they realized that if I am not there looking after them, then they are done. So they don't go forth because they are protecting other people's lives, that's why they couldn't do

it, but then they were practicing as laypeople, they didn't take their duty towards their family and so on, to be the excuse to also live a sensual life.

If you want to understand the Dhamma, you need to live withdrawn from sensuality and that is easier to do if you are not a layperson (living an ordinary lay lifestyle), but if you choose to live as a layperson means you are adding another extra task on top of trying to understand the Dhamma. That extra task being sense restraint amidst the environment which is the opposite of the environment of sense restraint, and that's very hard to sustain, which is why people would tend to avoid or turn a blind eye to the fact that they are responsible for the choice of their environment, and then just go with it.

If people think that five precepts are enough to practice the Dhamma, well those weren't even enough back in the Buddha's day. The Buddha taught the five precepts to people, not as a basis for getting the right view, but as a basis for differentiating a human from an animal, as a basis for a good future birth, and as a basis for eventual wisdom through that initial sense restraint. So if you have someone who doesn't even keep the five precepts and hopes that they can practice Dhamma or who has a view that they are practicing Dhamma at the same time, that is simply impossible, it's an utter contradiction in terms. Sense restraint is not optional when it comes to following the Buddha's instructions. You can choose to be whatever you like but you cannot choose to be unrestrained and practice the Dhamma at the same time.

Whenever people who were not monks and understood the Dhamma back in the day, it was because they were withdrawn from sensuality and even if they decided to go back to sensuality afterward, it has to be done at the expense of the practice, so you cannot do the practice and be engaging in sensuality. You might be content with what you have understood and not make any further effort, as complacency is expected, but when that happens in the discourses the Buddha would admonish such people and urge them to not be complacent.

You can get complacent with your attainment, but to develop that attainment you cannot start from that complacency. Thinking: "I am fine in whatever environment I am in and sensuality is not a problem for me", that's wrong thinking because sensuality is always a problem. Sensuality is a direct contradiction to the principles of the Dhamma that needs to be understood. You cannot have both.

"...Aggivessana, it's as if there were a great mountain and two companions would go to that mountain. On arrival, one of the companions would stay at the foot of the mountain, and one would climb to the top. The companion staying at the foot of the mountain would ask the companion standing on top, 'What do you see, my friend, standing on top of the mountain?' 'He would say, 'I see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes.'

"The other would say, 'It's impossible, my friend. It cannot happen that standing on top of the mountain you would see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, & delightful lakes.'

“Then the companion standing on top, descending to the foot of the mountain and grabbing his companion by the arm, would make him climb to the top. After letting him catch his breath for a moment, he would ask him, ‘What do you see, my friend, standing on top of the mountain?’

“He would say, ‘I see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes.’

“The other would say, ‘But just now didn’t you say, “It’s impossible, my friend. It cannot happen, that standing on top of the mountain you would see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes”? Yet now I understand you to say, “I see delightful parks, delightful forests, delightful stretches of land, and delightful lakes.”’

“The other would say, ‘But that’s because I was standing blocked by this great mountain and didn’t see.’

“In the same way, Aggivessana, Prince Jayasena is blocked, obstructed, impeded, and enveloped by the even greater mass of ignorance. For him, living amid sensuality, enjoying sensuality, consumed by thoughts of sensuality, burning with the fever of sensuality, intent on the search for sensuality, to know or see or realize that which is to be known through renunciation, seen through renunciation, attained through renunciation, realized through renunciation: That’s impossible. ...” -[Mn125](#)

The point is to recognize that your criteria for what is right and what is possible are not necessarily correct because you might very well be at the bottom of the mountain, and you are refusing to climb for whatever reason and using an excuse to indulge in whatever is at the bottom of that mountain. And again it doesn’t matter whether you wear robes or not, what matters is whether you accept sensuality on the mental level, whether you are physically withdrawn from it and whether you are practicing sense restraint for the goal of overcoming it. That’s why you need to take responsibility for your choices because otherwise, you won’t feel responsible for engaging in sensuality because you haven’t taken responsibility for choosing to not climb the mountain in terms of the practice, not to go into the higher environment, which is fine but that now means that you have to be twice as careful at the bottom of that mountain. You can think: “I’m not at the top and therefore I can fully indulge and engage with whatever comes my way down here at the bottom”, but as I said that is a completely separate thing, that is completely another extra layer on top of something which is already a compromise.

You start the practice by learning and fully integrating or realizing that there is no possibility of understanding anything that has been learned unless there is a proper basis of virtue developed and a proper establishment of senses restraint. This means, being celibate, eating for the right reasons and it means keeping more than five precepts. Basically, five precepts are a non-negotiable basis for the arising of a human life, so if you do not want to be like an animal, mentally having an animal mind, then five precepts are the threshold below which you cannot go, and yes five precepts do offer an improvement to an unrestrained mind but if you want to understand the Dhamma, or discern the sign of your mind, which is the necessary

condition for *sotapatti* -the right view, then the mind needs to be fully withdrawn from sensuality, it needs to be celibate and not be entertaining sensual options throughout the day.

If you can sustain that level in the environment at the bottom of the mountain, that's fine, but it has always been hard to sustain that even back in the Buddha's day without the various options for distraction that we have today. To sustain such restraint today in such a sensual pressuring environment, you will need to possess some serious willpower and if you possess such willpower, then there is nothing binding you to the bottom of that mountain anymore anyway, you would already have overcome it and have moved to a better place.

Mn81: With Ghaṭikāra

“So I have heard. At one time the Buddha was wandering in the land of the Kosalans together with a large Saṅgha of mendicants. Then the Buddha left the road, and at a certain spot, he smiled. Then Venerable Ānanda thought, “What is the cause, what is the reason why the Buddha smiled? Realized Ones do not smile for no reason.” So Ānanda got up from his seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, raised his joined palms toward the Buddha, and said, “What is the cause, what is the reason why the Buddha smiled? Realized Ones do not smile for no reason.”

“Once, Ānanda, there was a market town in this spot named Vebhaliṅga. It was prosperous and full of people. And Kassapa, a blessed one, a perfected one, a fully awakened Buddha, lived supported by Vebhaliṅga. It was here, in fact, that he had his monastery, where he sat and advised the mendicant Saṅgha.” Then Ānanda spread out his outer robe folded in four and said to the Buddha, “Well then, sir, may the Blessed One sit here! Then this piece of land will have been occupied by two perfected ones, fully awakened Buddhas.” The Buddha sat on the seat spread out. When he was seated he said to Venerable Ānanda:

“Once, Ānanda, there was a market town in this spot named Vebhaliṅga. It was prosperous and full of people. And Kassapa, a blessed one, a perfected one, a fully awakened Buddha, lived supported by Vebhaliṅga. It was here, in fact, that he had his monastery, where he sat and advised the mendicant Saṅgha.

The Buddha Kassapa had as a chief supporter in Vebhaliṅga a potter named Ghaṭikāra. Ghaṭikāra had a dear friend named Jotipāla, a brahmin student. Then Ghaṭikāra addressed Jotipāla, ‘Come, dear Jotipāla, let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

When he said this, Jotipāla said to him, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭikāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

For a second time ... and a third time, Ghaṭikāra addressed Jotipāla, ‘Come, dear Jotipāla, let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

For a third time, Jotipāla said to him, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭikāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

‘Well then, dear Jotipāla, let’s take some bathing paste of powdered shell and go to the river to bathe.’

‘Yes, dear,’ replied Jotipāla. So that’s what they did.

Then Ghaṭikāra addressed Jotipāla, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

When he said this, Jotipāla said to him, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭikāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

For a second time ... and a third time, Ghaṭikāra addressed Jotipāla, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

For a third time, Jotipāla said to him, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭikāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

Then Ghaṭikāra grabbed Jotipāla by the belt and said, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

So Jotipāla undid his belt and said to Ghaṭikāra, ‘Enough, dear Ghaṭikāra. What’s the use of seeing that bald, fake ascetic?’

Then Ghaṭikāra grabbed Jotipāla by the hair of his freshly-washed head and said, ‘Dear Jotipāla, the Buddha Kassapa’s monastery is not far away. Let’s go to see the Blessed One Kassapa, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha. For I regard it as holy to see that Blessed One.’

Then Jotipāla thought, ‘It’s incredible, it’s amazing, how this potter Ghaṭikāra, though born in a lower caste, should presume to grab me by the hair of my freshly-washed head! This must be no ordinary matter.’ He said to Ghaṭikāra, ‘You’d even milk it to this extent, dear Ghaṭikāra?’

‘I even milk it to this extent, dear Jotipāla. For that is how holy I regard it to see that Blessed One.’

‘Well then, dear Ghaṭikāra, release me, we shall go.’

Then Ghaṭikāra the potter and Jotipāla the brahmin student went to the Buddha Kassapa. Ghaṭikāra bowed and sat down to one side, but Jotipāla exchanged greetings with the Buddha and sat down to one side.

Ghaṭikāra said to the Buddha Kassapa, ‘Sir, this is my dear friend Jotipāla, a brahmin student. Please teach him the Dhamma.’ Then the Buddha Kassapa educated, encouraged, fired up, and inspired Ghaṭikāra and Jotipāla with a Dhamma talk. Then they got up from their seat, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha Kassapa, keeping him on their right, before leaving.

Then Jotipāla said to Ghaṭikāra, ‘Dear Ghaṭikāra, you have heard this teaching, so why don’t you go forth from the lay life to homelessness?’

‘Don’t you know, dear Jotipāla, that I look after my blind old parents?’

‘Well then, dear Ghaṭikāra, I shall go forth from the lay life to homelessness.’

Then Ghaṭikāra and Jotipāla went to the Buddha Kassapa, bowed, and sat down to one side. Ghaṭikāra said to the Buddha Kassapa, ‘Sir, this is my dear friend Jotipāla, a brahmin student. Please give him the going forth.’ And Jotipāla the brahmin student received the going forth, the ordination in the Buddha’s presence.

Not long after Jotipāla’s ordination, a fortnight later, the Buddha Kassapa—having stayed in Vebhaliṅga as long as he wished—set out for Benares. Traveling stage by stage, he arrived at Benares, where he stayed near Benares, in the deer park at Isipatana. King Kikī of Kāśi heard that he had arrived. He had the finest carriages harnessed. He then mounted a fine carriage and, along with other fine carriages, set out in full royal pomp from Benares to see the Buddha Kassapa. He went by carriage as far as the terrain allowed, then descended and approached the Buddha Kassapa on foot. He bowed and sat down to one side. The Buddha educated, encouraged, fired up, and inspired him with a Dhamma talk.

Then King Kikī said to the Buddha, ‘Sir, would the Buddha together with the mendicant Saṅgha please accept tomorrow’s meal from me?’ The Buddha Kassapa consented in silence.

Then, knowing that the Buddha had consented, King Kikī got up from his seat, bowed, and respectfully circled the Buddha, keeping him on his right, before leaving. And when the night had passed, King Kikī had a variety of delicious foods prepared in his own home—soft saffron rice with the dark grains picked out, served with many soups and sauces. Then he had the Buddha informed of the time, saying, ‘Sir, it’s time. The meal is ready.’

Then Kassapa Buddha robed up in the morning and, taking his bowl and robe, went to the home of King Kikī, where he sat on the seat spread out, together with the Saṅgha of mendicants. Then King Kikī served and satisfied the mendicant Saṅgha headed by the Buddha with his own hands with a variety of delicious foods.

When the Buddha Kassapa had eaten and washed his hand and bowl, King Kikī took a low seat and sat to one side. There he said to the Buddha Kassapa, ‘Sir, may the Buddha please accept my invitation to reside in Benares for the rainy season. The Saṅgha will be looked after in the same style.’

‘Enough, great king. I have already accepted an invitation for the rains residence.’

For a second time ... and a third time King Kikī said to the Buddha Kassapa, ‘Sir, may the Buddha please accept my invitation to reside in Benares for the rainy season. The Saṅgha will be looked after in the same style.’

‘Enough, Great King. I have already accepted an invitation for the rains residence.’

Then King Kikī, thinking, ‘The Buddha does not accept my invitation to reside for the rains in Benares,’ became sad and upset. Then King Kikī said to the Buddha Kassapa, ‘Sir, do you have another supporter better than me?’

‘Great king, there is a market town named Vebhaliṅga, where there’s a potter named Ghaṭikāra. He is my chief supporter. Now, great king, you thought, “The Buddha does not accept my invitation to reside for the rains in Benares,” and you became sad and upset. But Ghaṭikāra doesn’t get upset, nor will he.

Ghaṭikāra has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha. He doesn’t kill living creatures, steal, commit sexual misconduct, lie, or take alcoholic drinks that cause negligence. He has experiential confidence in the Buddha, the teaching, and the Saṅgha, and has the ethics loved by the noble ones. He is free of doubt regarding suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation. He eats in one part of the day; he’s celibate, ethical, and of good character. He has set aside gems and gold and rejected gold and money. He’s put down the shovel and doesn’t dig the earth with his own hands. He takes what has crumbled off by a riverbank or been dug up by mice, and brings it back in a carrier. When he has made a pot, he says, “Anyone may leave bagged sesame, mung beans, or chickpeas here and take what they wish.” He looks after his blind old parents. And since he has ended the five lower fetters, Ghaṭikāra will be reborn spontaneously and will become extinguished there, not liable to return from that world.

This one time, great king, I was staying near the market town of Vebhaliṅga. Then I robed up in the morning and, taking my bowl and robe, went to the home of Ghaṭikāra’s parents, where I said to them, “Excuse me, where has Ghaṭikāra gone?”

“Your supporter has gone out, sir. But take rice from the pot and sauce from the pan and eat.” So that’s what I did. And after eating I got up from my seat and left.

Then Ghaṭikāra went up to his parents and said, “Who took rice from the pot and sauce from the pan, ate it, and left?”

“It was the Buddha Kassapa, my dear.”

Then Ghaṭikāra thought, “I’m so fortunate, so very fortunate, in that the Buddha Kassapa trusts me so much!” Then joy and happiness did not leave him for a fortnight, or his parents for a week.

Another time, great king, I was staying near that same market town of Vebhaliṅga. Then I robed up in the morning and, taking my bowl and robe, went to the home of Ghaṭikāra’s parents, where I said to them, “Excuse me, where has Ghaṭikāra gone?”

“Your supporter has gone out, sir. But take porridge from the pot and sauce from the pan and eat.” So that’s what I did. And after eating I got up from my seat and left.

Then Ghaṭikāra went up to his parents and said, “Who took porridge from the pot and sauce from the pan, ate it, and left?”

“It was the Buddha Kassapa, my dear.”

Then Ghaṭikāra thought, “I’m so fortunate, so very fortunate, to be trusted so much by the Buddha Kassapa!” Then joy and happiness did not leave him for a fortnight, or his parents for a week.

Another time, great king, I was staying near that same market town of Vebhaliṅga. Now at that time my hut leaked. So I addressed the mendicants,

“Mendicants, go to Ghaṭikāra’s home and find some grass.”

When I said this, those mendicants said to me, “Sir, there’s no grass there, but his workshop has a grass roof.”

“Then go to the workshop and strip the grass.” So that’s what they did.

Then Ghaṭikāra’s parents said to those mendicants, “Who’s stripping the grass from the workshop?”

“It’s the mendicants, sister. The Buddha’s hut is leaking.”

“Take it, sirs! Take it, my dears!”

Then Ghaṭikāra went up to his parents and said, “Who stripped the grass from the workshop?”

“It was the mendicants, dear. It seems the Buddha’s hut is leaking.”

Then Ghaṭikāra thought, “I’m so fortunate, so very fortunate, to be trusted so much by the Buddha Kassapa!” Then joy and happiness did not leave him for a fortnight, or his parents for a week.

Then the workshop remained with the sky for a roof for the whole three months, but no rain fell on it. And that, great king, is what Ghaṭikāra the potter is like.’

‘Ghaṭikāra the potter is fortunate, very fortunate, to be so trusted by the Buddha Kassapa.’

Then King Kikī sent around five hundred cartloads of rice, soft saffron rice, and suitable sauce to Ghaṭikāra. Then one of the king’s men approached Ghaṭikāra and said, ‘Sir, these five hundred cartloads of rice, soft saffron rice, and suitable sauce have been sent to you by King Kikī of Kāsī. Please accept them.’

‘The king has many duties, and much to do. I have enough. Let this be for the king himself.’

Ānanda, you might think: ‘Surely the brahmin student Jotipāla must have been someone else at that time?’ But you should not see it like this. I was the student Jotipāla at that time.”

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, Venerable Ānanda was happy with what the Buddha said.
